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AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO THE TRANSLATION STUDIES CURRICULUM

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Abstract

This article details how a group of instructors at Hamad bin Khalifa University in Qatar instituted an integrated curriculum for all students entering the university's Master in Translation Studies and Master in Audiovisual Translation. First, it discusses the unique multicultural context in which these two programs operate. It then describes the details of the implementation, focusing on the role that an oral history project played in the curriculum. It ends with an appraisal of the program's success and a consideration of future directions, looking at the need for integrated approaches to learning in the context of emerging institutions of higher education.

Key words: critical pedagogy, global approach, integrated curriculum, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), oral history, postgraduate education, translation studies, Qatar

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Translation and Interpreting Institute of Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU) opened its doors in 2012. It currently offers two MA degrees: one in Translation Studies (MATS) and one in audiovisual translation (MAAT), the latter being the first of its kind in the Arab world. This article describes how the instructors of these two programs introduced an integrated curriculum for all incoming students — a response to their experiences teaching a diverse student body at a new institution of higher education in the Arabian Gulf. We begin by describing the larger context that informed our decision to take this curricular approach, discussing the trends in postsecondary education in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that led to the creation of our university and master programs, as well as the challenges raised by working within a highly multicultural student body in Qatar. Next, we describe the curriculum itself, focusing on the tools we used to facilitate communication among instructors and between instructors and students. We then detail the sites of integration between the individual modules of our program, paying special attention to the role that an oral history project played in the curriculum. Finally, we discuss the positive results of our integrated approach and outline some areas for further improvement and expansion. We conclude that our experience not only provides a model for other Translation Studies programs but also shows how an integrated approach can be especially effective in postgraduate programs operating in increasingly internationalized and globalized institutions of higher education.

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2. RATIONALE AND GOALS FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Before delving into the design and implementation of our integrated curriculum, it is necessary to give an overview of the institutional and cultural contexts that shaped our efforts. On an institutional level, the recent establishment of Hamad bin Khalifa University (of which the MAAT and MATS are part) reflects the larger trends that have shaped higher education in the Arabian Gulf over the last several decades. Beginning in the 1990s, governments across the Middle East and North Africa responded to economic pressures and a demographic ‘youth bulge’ by instituting a series of education reforms (El Hassan, 2012, p. 57). In the case of the Arabian Gulf, these reforms have mostly been characterized by *imported internationalization*, that is, close partnerships with European and North American institutions of higher education (Buckner, 2011, p. 24). In Qatar, for instance, institutions like University College London (UK) and Georgetown University (US) have opened satellite campuses in the country’s Education City. At the same time, however, Gulf countries have also pursued the establishment of ‘home-grown’ universities, like Zayed University in Dubai and HBKU in Qatar. The idea driving these latter initiatives is to build programs that meet the same international standards of the imported universities while focusing specifically on local needs. Thus, as part of HBKU, the MAAT and MATS programs have grown out of a desire to create internationally recognized graduate programs that build translation capacity and scholarly endeavour in Qatar. Initiatives such as this one form part of a larger plan to lessen the country’s dependence on natural

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resource wealth and shift towards a knowledge economy (General Secretariat For Development Planning, 2008).

In terms of cultural context, it is important to keep in mind that Qatar's population is multicultural. In fact, only 12% of the country's approximately 2.2 million inhabitants is Qatari (Snoj & Soman, 2014, p. 41). While one of HBKU's priorities is the education of Qatari nationals, the demographic realities of the country mean that, in practice, the student body of the MAAT and MATS hails from all over the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. Students are equally likely to be fresh graduates from local and international institutions as they are to be veterans of the workforce, returning to school after years as teachers, translators, or administrators. Although they are highly motivated, many students arrive with a patchy skills set. On the one hand, few had completed a BA degree in Translation Studies and, for this reason, they lack basic knowledge of the theory and concepts that are central to the field. On the other hand, many have gaps in the cognitive and transferable competencies necessary for successful graduate education. Such skills include information literacy, the use of theoretical meta-language and self-reflexivity, and familiarity with and adherence to academic standards and norms. For instance, when we asked students entering the program in September 2015 for examples of academic research projects that they had completed during their BA studies, over one third were unable to provide writing samples because they had never been required to complete such a project. In short, the MAAT and MATS students are diverse in their cultural backgrounds, their expectations as to what graduate studies should entail, and their ability to meet the standards held by their professors.

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It was in direct response to working with this unique student profile that we designed and implemented an integrated curriculum in the first semester of both our master programs. The idea originated in the creation of an academic writing module that would run parallel to the program's introductory theory module, following the *linked class* model described by Johns (Johns, 1997, pp. 83–85). However, when the program's accrediting body recommended that more opportunities for hands-on practice in translation be added to the program (Cifuentes-Goodbody & Karatsolis, 2016), faculty opted to add a pragmatic translation unit in the first semester. From there, the instructors for these classes decided to link their syllabi, aligning the topics that would be taught in each class and creating project-based assessments that students would complete across the three units.

While the diversity of definitions and terms surrounding the concept of the *integrated curriculum* can be somewhat confusing (Kysilka, 1998), the term describes any effort by teachers to break down the disciplinary divisions that often structure a student's learning experience and then build a curriculum around broad topics, common themes, or specific projects that are more relevant to the students' lived experience and allow them to build a rich web of connected knowledge that better equips them to deal with real-world problems. In their extensive review of the literature on integrated curriculum approaches, Mathison & Freeman (1998, pp. 19–21) note that there are numerous benefits associated with such an approach, from an increased understanding and retaining of general concepts to an improved ability to assess and transfer this information when solving new problems. Some even point to a

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growth in students' self-identification as a meaningful member of a learning community. These are broadly reflective of the outcomes that we wanted for our integrated curriculum. More specifically, though, we hoped that students would end the semester having understood the expectations for an internationally-benchmarked postgraduate degree and having gained the ability to meet those expectations as independent, responsible, and creative learners (Bologna Working Group, 2005, pp. 67–68).

Another key motivation specific to the Translation Studies context was to productively address the resistance to theory that we had frequently encountered in our students in the first years of teaching. This is not a new phenomenon and one frequently debated between academics and practitioners in the field of translation (Boase-Beier, 2013; Chesterman & Wagner, 2002; Dore, forthcoming; Katan, 2009; Massardier-Kenney, Baer, Tymoczko, & Maier, 2016), but it had been particularly pronounced in our early cohorts of students. With some already working as translators and a widespread perception in the local market that translation was nothing more than an administrative task, student expectations were often around vocational 'practice, practice, practice' and comparative linguistic competencies in Arabic and English. Few saw a need to develop high-level cognitive skills and professional transferrable skills. For many, the idea that translation might be something not that you do, but that you study and research was completely novel. So our goal was for students to demonstrate through their coursework how theory and practice informed each other and how translation was much more than 'looking up words in the dictionary'.

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3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

Given our students' level of prior knowledge both in terms of the discipline of Translation Studies and the academic demands of a postgraduate program, we agreed that everyone who entered the MAAT and MATS would take the same three modules:

- *Introduction to Translation Studies*, which aimed to familiarize students with the main scholarly approaches in the field while also encouraging critical engagement with theoretical concepts;
- *Introduction to Research Methods*, which was designed to give students the information literacy needed to conduct digital and print research, the *genre literacy* (Dudley-Evans, 2000; Johns, 1997) needed to evaluate and write academic texts, and the self-reflective mindset needed for academic research and writing; and
- *Pragmatic Translation*, which provided students with extensive, hands-on practice in the translation of texts, and the evaluation and revision of those translations.¹

In addition to these modules, professors worked closely with specialists at the university's writing centre to create three

¹ We would like to thank our colleagues Amer Al-Adwan and Rashid Yahiaoui for their work in teaching *Pragmatic Translation*. Without their expertise and collaboration, it would have been impossible to design and implement the integrated curriculum we describe in this article.

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required workshops on aspects of English-language writing that had proved difficult for past cohorts — namely, avoiding plagiarism, structuring paragraphs, and revising and proofreading drafts. Taken as a whole, the first-semester curriculum was designed to give students a foundation in translation theory, translation practice, and academic research and writing at the MA level.

Key to the success of this integration was communication, both between teachers and between teachers and students. Communication between teachers began with pre-semester meetings in which the syllabi were designed and course calendars aligned so that tasks and topics flowed logically between courses and credited assignments were dispersed so as to avoid overly demanding submission deadlines. Teachers also met every two weeks to share content covered in class, discuss any problems or issues arising, and monitor student responses. For communication between students and teachers, we employed a weekly in-class Critical Incident Questionnaire, based on the tool designed by Brookfield (1995). In this survey, students were asked to identify moments in any of their three classes that week in which they had been ‘most engaged’ or ‘most distanced’ from what was happening. They were also asked to identify moments that they had found the most ‘affirming and helpful’ or ‘puzzling and confusing’. Because the survey was anonymous, students were candid with their comments, and that allowed us to quickly identify what was working and what needed improvement. This was especially helpful in changing the format of the writing centre workshops and adjusting the deadlines of assignments over the course of the semester. It also provided insight into how the students

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themselves began to become active participants in their own learning. For instance, students often pointed to the presentations that their colleagues gave in *Introduction to Translation Studies* and the peer-reviews of written work in *Introduction to Research Methods* as the most helpful moments of the week.

A final component in teacher-student communication were assessment rubrics. The rubrics separated out the various requirements of each assignment, in terms of both content (e.g. addressing the question, logical argumentation, effective and appropriate use of theory, the use of supporting evidence) and form (e.g. academic writing conventions, grammar and usage, structure and paragraphing). While we had always used rubrics to evaluate student work, in previous years we had only given the rubric to students as part of the written feedback after we had graded that work, the idea being that the purpose of the rubric was to justify each grade. This time, however, we distributed the assignment instructions and rubric together, and reviewed both in-class. In this way, the rubric became a way for us to set clear expectations for each assessment.

4. SITES OF INTEGRATION: THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The principle site of integration for our three modules was the Oral History Project, a semester-long assignment where students interviewed friends and family about their lives. Before going into the details of this project, however, it is important to mention another site of integration: major written assessments. Take for instance the annotated research bibliography that

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students had to complete in *Introduction to Translation Studies*. In order to complete this task, the instructor in *Introduction to Research Methods* conducted several workshops on using academic databases to search for texts, evaluating and summarising sources, and organizing and citing sources using citation management software. Likewise, in *Pragmatic Translation*, the students had to complete several translation commentaries. After students explained in their Critical Incident Questionnaires that they were unsure about what information they should provide in their commentaries, the instructor for *Introduction to Research Methods* introduced them more explicitly to the requirements of the genre through the notions of concrete and abstract language (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1972/1991; Seabury, 1991; Shei, 2005).

As for the Oral History Project, there were several reasons why we decided to use this task to tie together the three modules. Oral history has become something of a ‘hot topic’ in the states of the Arabian Gulf, where ‘culture’ and ‘heritage’ are key (if ambiguous) terms in official visions of ambitious national modernizing projects (Harding, 2014). In Qatar, several different initiatives are underway to collect and preserve oral histories, but they have been somewhat hampered by a lack of trained and skilled translators who are able to transcribe, translate, and advise on the curation of this material. Thus, one reason for incorporating such a project into our integrated curriculum was to provide initial training to students who might later contribute to these initiatives. Beyond its relevance to Qatari society, oral history has proved an effective tool in engaging students in the classroom because they are involved in the creation of texts that are directly relevant to them (Hodges,

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2016; Jolliffe, 2010, 2014; Telafici, 2016). With the diverse national backgrounds and familial life-trajectories of our students, the oral history project had the added advantage of being adaptive enough that each student could find personal significance in it.

A final reason for using oral history as a unifying project was the evident and yet under-studied connection it has to the field of Translation Studies. With the prominent role of language in the collection and curation of oral histories, surprisingly little attention has been paid to issues of translation. This neglect has been remarked upon elsewhere (McDonough Dolmaya, 2015), but even a brief consideration of the genre highlights the complexities of purpose(s) and practice(s), the interstices of language, identity, voice, representation, narrative truths, memory, culture, geopolitics and history inherent in the material — all of which are underpinned by translation, be it interlingual, intralingual or inter-semiotic (Sato-Rossberg, 2012; see Temple, 2013). The questions that Temple (2013) raises around multilingualism and identity seemed especially relevant given that our students speak one language at home, are educated in another, and must also be proficient in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). What is more, we saw all these issues as extremely important to our students because the majority of them would engage in cross-language research in their MA theses, collecting their data in Arabic and writing up their findings in English for an international audience (Piazzoli, 2015; Temple, 2006). In sum, the aim of the Oral History Project was to provide students with a project-based, semester-long assignment that involved working with a topic and text in which they had a vested, personal interest and through which they would begin to learn to

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problematize translation, to recognize and describe the various features of a text, and to grapple with issues of dialect, standard language, translation purposes, loss, gain and audience.

In terms of design, this project took place over the course of the entire semester and was divided into several different assessments:

1. Formulating questions;
2. Translating questions into the language of the interview;
3. Interviewing subjects;
4. Writing follow-up notes;
5. Transcribing an excerpt of interview;
6. Translating the excerpt into MSA;
7. Translating the excerpt into English; and
8. Writing a commentary on the Arabic-English translation.

Tasks 1 through 5 were in-class activities and homework over the first four weeks in *Introduction to Translation Studies* and counted together as low-stakes, credit assignments for that class. Those tasks that involved translation (2, 6, and 7) formed the basis of class activities and teaching content in *Pragmatic Translation*. The final translation and commentary (8) went through draft and peer-review workshops in *Introduction to Research Methods* and was submitted as a credit assignment in *Pragmatic Translation*. Finally, while curation was not a part of the project, potential or hypothetical curation was discussed in *Introduction to Translation Studies*, mainly relating to functional translation theories and incorporated into students' commentaries.

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The task of introducing the project to students fell to the instructor of *Introduction to Translation Studies*. In spite of the prevalence of oral history in the contemporary discourse of academics, government institutions, and museums in the region, students were largely ignorant of it. At first, students thought the term referred to a ‘history of language’ or ‘historians talking about history’. Since many felt that history was something static and official, the idea that ordinary people could talk about their lives and that these stories could be considered history was largely a new concept. Because this was an introductory course, much of the project was described in lay terms. However, since one of the aims of the integrated curriculum was for our students to begin conceptualising and analysing translation using a more sophisticated vocabulary (taken to be indicative of a higher cognitive process and a self-reflective practice that is beginning to utilize theory and meta-language), the instructions for the project stated, ‘If you can demonstrate that you are able to begin to analyse what is involved in each of the various tasks, that is, if you are able to speak and write about what you do and discover, then you will be successful’. Our hope was that students would begin to incorporate more complex thinking and terminology as the semester progressed. A first indication that students were open to this trajectory was their initial discussion of how to translate the term *oral history* into Arabic. This proved a useful starting point for thinking about the intercultural and interlingual translation of theory, terminology and abstractions.

5. RESULTS

At the start of the semester, the goals for our integrated curriculum were to cultivate classroom material that was

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personally engaging to students, make students appreciate the theoretical concerns present in the practice of translation, and set clear expectations for the level of work required for an MA degree. By the end of the semester, we were pleased to see progress on all of these fronts. We were especially impressed with the range of material that students generated in their interviews. As is so regularly the case with student-led learning, the topics students explored through their choice of interviewees and interviews were far richer and more diverse than we were likely to have suggested from a teacher-focused perspective. They included Sudanese music, intercultural marriages, raising special needs children, multi-language learning, war and migration, childhood in Qatar, Mauritanian labour politics in the 1960s, Qatari weddings, Bedouin life in the Saudi Arabian desert, and Palestinian experiences of displacement and life under occupation. What is more, the richness of these topics speaks to the ways in which the practices of oral history and translation can inform each other, all of which invite further investigation.

In the final commentaries for the projects, we noted that students were able to discuss complex topics relating to their translations (although still expressed in a somewhat crude fashion). Their texts touched on issues from pronunciation and transcription to the interconnections between cultural and religious linguistic expressions. Most notable was their grappling with issues of register and diglossia, grounded in the differences and tensions between spoken Arabic dialects and the written MSA. Students reflected on the loss of ‘vernacular flavour’ and emotions when translating into MSA, and on various issues of identity and the use of the vernacular. With translation so often described in the

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region as being simply between Arabic and English, the raising of student awareness to the intricacies and politics of language use and expectations was a welcome step towards the problematizing of translation.

We also observed that students used a far greater number of theoretical terms and concepts in their final commentary when compared to similar assignments from earlier in the semester. These included code-switching; style (emotive language, figures of speech, intonation, syntax); functional theories (particularly in terms of potential curatorship); register; overt translation, text types and hybridity; genre; intra-lingual, inter-lingual and inter-semiotic translation; coherence; cohesion; cultural-specific items; and reader reaction and effect. They also drew readily on the translation theories presented in the first half of our main textbook (Munday, 2012), referring to Nida's dynamic and formal equivalence, Newmarks' communicative translation, Vinay and Darbelnet's shift analysis, Hallidayan concepts of register, evaluative language and markedness, Reiss and Nord's text-type analysis and Vermeer's functional approaches. The ability of students to situate their own practice within the landscape of previous scholarly discussion using the highly-specific genre of academic language and argument — even at an introductory level — was a welcome initial indication that students were beginning to engage with theory in ways that were meaningful and relevant to them and their work. Students also frequently justified and explained their translation choices in terms not just of *meaning*, but in terms of the text and what they wanted to do with it as well as in terms of what they believed or felt about the language, the interviewee and the topics discussed,

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thus demonstrating a nascent awareness of their active agency in the translation process.

Finally, we observed that students had assimilated many of the expectations that we had in terms of their commitment to the program as well as the level of their involvement in class and their independent work outside the classroom. On the one hand, students ended the semester able to write academic texts with some degree of fluency and adherence to the norms of the genre, including bibliographic referencing and citations. On the other hand, it was evident that students acknowledged that such projects require transferable skills such as independent learning and time management. For instance, when the instructor of *Introduction to Research Methods* asked the class to write ‘tips’ for next year’s cohort, they came up with suggestions such as:

- ‘Don’t be shocked at the beginning of the course. You’ll get the hang of it soon.’
- ‘Document everything. Don’t throw anything away.’
- ‘Establish friendly relationships with resources. Make the texts you read your friends.’
- ‘Always have the evaluation criteria in front of you when working on an assignment.’
- ‘Peer reviews are important because they help you view your own work with another pair of eyes.’
- ‘Set yourself a deadline that is before the actual one, and respect it.’

We cite these examples because they show how our students emerged from their first semester with a much clearer

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understanding of what they would need to do in order to successfully complete their postgraduate studies.

In addition to the results that we had anticipated for the our integrated curriculum, there were several moments where the students made spontaneous connections between their courses that came to us as a surprise. For instance, one student remarked during an activity in *Introduction to Research Methods* that he found the session more engaging because he recognized the theoretical terms being used from a presentation that another student had given in *Introduction to Translation Studies*. Likewise, in *Introduction to Translation Studies*, the instructor found that students often used the texts they were translating in *Pragmatic Translation* to give concrete examples of the theory discussed in class. These examples speak to the effectiveness of the integrated approach because they show how the students themselves created meaningful connections between the content taught in each module.

6. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Given our experience with this first version of our integrated curriculum, we are excited to build on our successes in coming semesters. From the positive student experience of the Oral History Project (and our surprise at students' unfamiliarity with the genre), we envisage future versions of our curriculum to better introduce the idea and practice of oral history. This could be done by having students discover and explore existing online oral history projects, through the reading and discussion of relevant literature, by raising questions on historiography and

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national narratives, and by bringing into the classroom local researchers engaged in the collection and curation of Gulf oral histories. In addition to oral history, we may extend student-led projects beyond the first semester into work that could be credited for other courses in the program, including the final thesis. This would give students opportunities to curate their work in any number of creative ways, such as through the production of bi- or tri-lingual anthologies or the production of multi-modal and multi-sensory texts incorporating audio-visual and accessible translation. This semester has also shown us that we must make more room in the classroom for Arabic as a language of critical engagement and reflection. For example, students may be required to complete one of their major writing assessments for the three modules in MSA.

Beyond the Translation Studies programs described here, our experience yields lessons for all educators working in international higher education. As discussed in the Introduction, higher education in the Arabian Gulf has recently been characterized by *imported internationalization*. As Miller-Idriss & Hanauer (2011, pp. 187–90) explain, this has fed into an argument whereby the Gulf serves as evidence that education systems are ultimately moving towards convergence. In his study of translation and globalization, Cronin (2003, p. 128) shows how many see this convergence — or *globalization as homogenization* as he calls it — as the latest incarnation of Western cultural imperialism: ‘The colonialism of the nineteenth century and its fear of the Double as the colonial subject [...] gives way to what we might term the ‘clonialism’ of the twenty-first century with its endless replication’. However, as Miller-Idriss & Hanauer (2011) show, regional and

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local factors have a significant role in shaping an institution — regardless of whether it is ‘imported’ or trying to conform to ‘global standards’. This is similar to what Cronin (2003, p. 34) terms *globalization as translation*, where each community translates global trends into their own local circumstances. When it comes to the education of translators, Kiraly (2005) makes the case that learning should not be the abstract transmission of general standards and best practices but rather a collaborative task that is situated in an authentic social context. Instructors who find themselves in new institutions in regions that have not been traditionally associated with postsecondary education may feel that their task is to replicate their own educational experience, which often took place in Europe or North America. However, they must remember that learning takes place when connected to their students’ context. And while it is important to ensure that learning outcomes rise to the standards of our academic disciplines, we would be well-served to keep in mind what Kalantzis & Cope (2005, p. 63) observe when examining the new global context of education: ‘You don’t have to be the same to be equal’.

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